

# INNOVATION AND FAITH INTEGRATION IN THE UNDERGRADUATE CAPSTONE STRATEGY COURSE

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper makes the case from a theoretical and practical point of view the potential to improve the way the undergraduate capstone strategy course is taught. Specific classroom methodologies are offered as ways to better prepare our students for the work environment they will face upon graduation. Specific attention is given to teaching strategy within a Christian University - offering a faith integration context.

## INTRODUCTION

Policy and Strategy, sometimes referred to as Administrative Policy, has been a staple offering of business programs for over 30 years in most business schools. This capstone course was created with several objectives in mind. One of the original intentions of this “capstone” course was to encourage and/or force the integration of various disciplines within the field of business into a comprehensive whole and to help students make the transition from the classroom to the real business world. In practice, business units within organizations in the past have too often functioned in information silos. Business schools have responded by encouraging a more integrative approach to education, particularly through the capstone strategy course.

Over the past several decades, business schools have been criticized (Mintzberg, 2004; Pfeffer & Fong, 2003) for not adequately preparing graduates with appropriate levels of both theory and application. Business schools have tended to either over-emphasize theory to the neglect of application or focus on practical application with little regard for theoretical underpinnings (Wren et al., 2007). Because of the negative press and increased competitive pressures in higher education, business schools have been required to re-think curriculum and methodologies. Are students prepared to face the challenges of the current workplace? Are our practices in the classroom appropriately matched to the realities our students will face when they graduate? As the capstone course, Policy and Strategy is a prime opportunity for giving students what they really need, solid understanding of theory and good practice applying it to real situations.

In addition to integrating all business functions and connecting theory with practice, Christian universities have the added commitment to integrating faith with learning. Throughout the business curriculum this takes on many possible forms, both inside and outside the classroom. We believe Policy and Strategy course provides a particular opportunity for students to consider how their own faith informs the way they will do business just as they are about to graduate and enter the workplace full time.

The authors of this paper have been teaching this foundation capstone course for several years. Dr. D holds a Ph.D. in strategy from a leading strategy institution. He has been experimenting with novel and innovative ways to teach the course over the last 20 years. Dr. K holds a DBA and has been teaching management and strategy courses, in the U.S. and

internationally, for over 12 years. Both authors agree with Raelin who says that, “Ultimately, we need a synthesis of theory and practice if we are to prepare thoughtful practitioners” (2007, 495). We believe we can give our students an edge in preparedness by synthesizing the various business disciplines, by synthesizing the theory and practice of business, and by synthesizing Christian beliefs with strategic management.

In this paper, we focus on practical techniques and methodologies for improving the undergraduate business capstone Strategy course. Following an abbreviated literature review, we will comment on time-tested methods, offer suggestions for improvement on some techniques, and present some new innovative ideas for use in the Strategy course. Additionally, we will present some survey responses from students regarding their impressions of the usefulness of the techniques in the class.

Our purpose in this paper is to open up a rigorous discussion and thoughtful debate about the teaching of Business Policy and Strategy in general and within the Christian context in particular. With this approach and in keeping with the 2012 CBFA Conference theme, we believe we are “Leading the Way!”

## THEORY-APPLICATION CONNECTION

Even with, or in spite of, the theory-application gap in business education, current literature provides support for a relational circle of theory and practice in business. Several have proposed models and documented the potential inter-connectivity of managers, researchers, consultants, students, and professors (Starkey & Madan, 2001; Aram & Salipante, 2003; Rynes et al., 2001; Van de Ven & Johnston, 2006, Burke & Rau, 2011; Hughes, Bence, Grisoni, O’Regan, & Wornham, 2011). Starkey and Madan describe “a virtuous circle of academics learning from managers, codifying information into blueprints for managerial practice, and managers learning from academics, developing and applying practically-derived theories” (2001: S11). These serve to illustrate the circular pattern which can be summed up as “a delicate balance of building theory, testing our theories for significance, making connections with practitioners of the crucible of applicability, and providing the knowledge gained to those who are our consumers” (Wren, Halbesleben, & Buckley 2007: 485).

Though much of the recent criticisms of business education have been directed towards business graduate schools, undergraduate business education must also consider the theory-application relationship. What are we doing to effectively prepare early and mid-career managers who graduate from our institutions? Education-oriented approaches, including service learning, internships, and simulations, are enjoying a renewed interest among academics as a means to overcome certain aspects of the theory-application gap.

A recent study, conducted by one of the authors of this paper (Dr. K), included focused, one-on-one interviews with professors regarding the theory-application gap in undergraduate management education. Among other things, the interviewees highlighted the idea of how a student *knows it*. That is, how does one know or learn theory, and how does one know or learn to apply it? On the one hand, pure theory cannot be digested (by undergraduates) and real application (real decision making in a real company) is not allowed just yet. In most cases, one cannot fully understand theory until one has applied it. So, there’s a bit of a catch-22. Perhaps students can “see” the theory well enough to pass the exam, but can they really apply it? That is the litmus test for knowing it. It is our job as professors, to make that link clear and strong. We do this through our methodologies and practices in the classroom and curriculum.

Another finding from this set of interviews was a theme of *preparedness*. Professors interviewed were unanimous in their concern for preparing students. A prepared student is one who is confidently ready to meet the expectations of employers. Interviewees' comments reflect the view that students who have experienced traveling from theory to application and back to theory are ready and able to go into the workplace adopting and interpreting theory to fit different situations. Again, this view points to the choices professors make when designing the business curriculum, particularly the Strategy course.

Throughout the interview process, professors were eager to share ways they believe help bring together theory and application. The list includes meta-assignments (combining several pedagogical techniques), service learning, project/product based assignments, field experience learning (international), case studies with one page analysis, simulations (including the accompanying stress and potential for failure), internships, real client consulting (business plans, interview/selection processes, marketing plans, web-site development, recommendations to management), internships for undergraduates in companies with graduate students, and progressive projects which are current event projects lasting the entire semester. These viewpoints reinforce findings from the literature, particularly regarding the intentional use of collaborative efforts, classroom research, and cross-company (and cross-discipline) projects.

The collective wisdom of the respondents suggests that theory alone is worth very little (or is even worthless) and that application alone is just a collection of stories which are easily forgotten and are, in fact, never applied. Stated in the positive, we can and should find ways to place high emphasis theory and application, simultaneously. We believe this can be done effectively by making certain adjustments to the Strategy course.

#### FAITH INTEGRATION – ANOTHER GAP

A further dimension emerges when we enter faith integration into the mix. Most faculty would agree that the discussions we have in our classes, are in fact, rather “theoretical” or idealistic in nature. Too often our students have a naïve conception of what the rough and tumble real world is all about. One of the authors, having taught in two large public universities before joining a Christian university, believes the same can be said about most students if they have not had a substantial professional position. But again, in our environment we must also work hard to make the scripture and Christian ideals applicable. We must also provide truthful feedback to the students about their mission in business organizations.

This was brought home a few years ago by a wonderful Christian businessman who served on one of our external advisory boards. He was very supportive of our institution and Christian education. But he reminded us in a kind but firm matter that we and our students need to understand something. To paraphrase his thoughts, “it is great for your students to have a Christian faith, moral and ethical ideals, but in the end you have to ask yourself, ‘What do you contribute to the bottom-line?’” While a sobering thought, we contend that our students are in a very strong position to answer that question. The strategy class is one where we must consistently get students to examine their distinctive God-given competencies in relationship to their career and future contributions.

#### TEACHING POLICY AND STRATEGY

As the capstone course, Policy and Strategy represents the culmination of business education for undergraduates. It carries a heavy load – it is the institution’s last chance to impart as much wisdom as possible to the students, and it is the last frontier for students ready to graduate. We want to insure that on the day after graduation, students find themselves well-prepared to face the current challenges of the workplace and general environment.

Many who teach strategy would agree on at least several of the following of objectives for the capstone strategy course.

- 1) Students (future business leaders) will understand the comprehensive nature of business and business challenges. Rarely is there any such thing as a strictly management, marketing, accounting, manufacturing, finance, or technology problem. Issues are always more complex than that.
- 2) Students will learn key concepts and develop skills in using tools of analysis from the field of strategic management.
- 3) Students who are about to enter the work force will have an understanding the latest real world issues that they will confront.
- 4) Students will demonstrate team-based skills that are increasingly being demanded by businesses today.
- 5) Students will learn and practice sound decision making skills.
- 6) Students will consider their future career and calling in terms of their unique skills, abilities, and distinctive competencies.
- 7) Students will learn to incorporate their Christian faith when addressing business strategy.

One can hardly argue with this list. The question is how to best accomplish these objectives. The authors of this paper would argue that “teaching Strategy ain’t what it used to be.” Given the “integration” challenges described above, we believe it is time to rethink how to approach those objectives. First, we want our methods to integrate the business disciplines thoroughly. Second, we want to bring theory and practice together in a way that truly prepares students for today and the immediate future. Third, we want our Christian students to be confident in their ability to connect their personal faith with their decision-making in the business world.

In addition to these integration challenges, the past 3-4 years have seen a string of cataclysmic changes in our economic system that cannot be glossed over in business education. These changes, starting with 9/11 and going forward, have greatly influenced the business landscape. This is the environment that our students must prepare for. The environment we are in now and can anticipate for the immediate future is one of major change, disruption, and even chaos. This environment is central to strategic thinking for today and the future.

To truly accomplish the objectives listed above, we must reconsider our tools and methodologies in Policy and Strategy. For example, the use of textbook cases has been a staple offering in strategy courses for years. This is a time-honored tradition, but unfortunately these cases are often badly out of date even as the ink hits the most current edition of the textbook. Can we really teach the same theories and applications using outdated texts and outdated cases? Many would defend the use of cases and even classic cases as a basis of teaching strategic principles. While we would not argue that point directly, we would suggest at a minimum, placing the past

firmly within the context of the present and future. As another example, short “situation cases” can be used in the classroom to illustrate certain strategic concepts. But do they really point to the complexities of the business situation? Perhaps, they do have some value in the classroom. However, they do not give students the chance to grapple with complex decision making in a dynamic business environment, which is what they’ll face upon graduation.

For the remainder of this paper, we will focus on methods and techniques that we have found to be useful and appropriate for today’s business student. We will start by commenting on some traditional techniques. We will then move to some modified techniques. And, finally, we will offer some innovative ideas that we have used with success in our Strategy courses.

## PRACTICAL TECHNIQUES

There are many different approaches to teaching the capstone course including:

- Traditional lecture/case analysis
- Supplementing the lectures with current literature such as *Harvard Business Review*, *Business Week*, and *Fortune*
- Simulations and business games
- Utilization of guest speakers
- Use of a limited number of short, localized tours.

While we continue to offer the traditional course with considerable success, we began to recognize several limitations in the traditional course including the following:

- Most case studies are quickly outdated even in new books. For example, many 2012 copyrighted books carry cases which are at least two years dated at the time of publication. Use of even “new” cases usually requires considerable updating and revision. While classic cases are instructive, more often than not the issues or context are dramatically different. Many publishers are now coming out with non-case versions of their textbooks because of this problem.
- Utilizing current literature such as the *Wall Street Journal* and *Fortune* can be extremely helpful but must also embrace theoretical content.
- By the time they are seniors, many students have heard the entire lingo about JIT, lean manufacturing, program planning, globalization, strategy formulation, and implementation, etc. But they tend to question whether these things are really used in the “real world.” Many business schools and textbooks have in fact tended to de-emphasize manufacturing in recent years and our students do not have adequate exposure to these topics.
- Many of our students end up with careers in non-business environments such as non-profit institutions, government or other types of service organizations, and most traditional strategy textbooks and courses do not adequately cover quasi-business organizations.
- Relationship building is an important aspect of an education at institutions like ours. Given the heavy teaching load we have, other institutional responsibilities, and ever increasing class sizes, it is difficult to develop the more personal relationships that both our students and we desire.

- Our students are increasingly not just competing with other students from United States' universities, but on a worldwide basis. Unless our students are "verbally shaken out of their sleep" many of them leave our institutions with a false sense of preparation and even a bit of arrogance. On the other hand, our students do receive a fine education and need to learn how to package their distinctive competencies.

### SOMETHINGS OLD, SOMETHINGS NEW

Specific techniques utilized in the current version of our courses will be detailed and then analyzed from the students' perspectives. A general list is included below. (It should be pointed out the Dr. K & Dr. D use their own particular combination of these techniques.) We each adapt them to our location, students, and institutions. New techniques or not widely used techniques are designated with a "\*"

1. Lectures that are designed specifically based on real time events. For example, we use the text only as a base and almost daily update the students and engage them in events as reported on CNBC and other real time news feeds. We use direct clips from the CNBC website as well as other relevant sites. Along with these lectures, we make extensive use of video-like cases. For example, we use David Favor's CNBC's program, "The New Age of Wal-Mart," as a real-time case over 4-5 weeks. Students also get an opportunity to come in for one or more video nights to earn extra credit by watching and analyzing tapes on companies such Nike, IKEA, Levi's, and GM that are easily obtainable and are current. In recent years, Christian based videos such as the "Call of the Entrepreneur," John Beckett's "Loving Monday," and Dr. Susan Emmerich's "When Heaven Meets Earth" has been added to our video library.

\*2. Team reports and Power Point Presentations on "Mega-Issues," (a term coined by one of us) to address the foremost current trends from population growth, to alternative energy, social security solvency, the growing power of Asia and many more. Students are then encouraged to apply the theoretical principles from the course to large scale business and social problems that present both strategic challenges and opportunities for businesses and other organizations. Each presentation is then followed directly by an "Insta-quiz" to encourage the students to pay attention.

3. While not a new concept, the use of *Fortune* magazine as a substitute for cases brings about realism not otherwise possible. Bi-weekly quizzes assure students read and digest the material.

\*4. The business department at one of the author's university has developed a "Community Leadership Forum Series" where we bring outstanding speakers to the campus. For example, we have hosted in recent years a Canadian Trade Commissioner, a newly appointed State Senator, a former chairman of AT & T Wireless; a successful non-profit consultant. We also recently sponsored a Young Professional Women's Seminar with six prominent and successful area women ranging from plant managers, to a newspaper editor, to an attorney. For our community forums, we intentionally invite 30-35 key area business leaders along with 30-35 of our students and make sure they inter-mix. While the speakers are informative, the networking, and learning

how to converse with local business leaders maybe the primary benefit. In several cases we have deliberately sponsored some of these forums with Christian organizations such as CBMC.

\*5. Rather than having students take an existing case from a text, and analyze it, each student is required to choose a major company and in essence write their own case under a highly structured decision-making model that requires integration and a great deal of research and original thought. This essentially prepares students for creating, analyzing, and selling of their ideas once they are hired. It also gives them a major item for their personal portfolio.

\*6. Probably the most original of all the techniques employed is the Personal Strategic Plan (PSP). It is also an excellent place for integrating faith and learning. After many years of teaching and consulting, we believe we know what works well for companies and organizations to formulate and implement strategic plans. While it can be taught to students, it is often not fully grasped. While it might be beneficial to apply the planning process to a company, it occurred to Dr. D a few years ago, that getting the students fully engaged takes something they are really interested in - namely themselves. Given the very challenging job environment we are facing, this class project is now more important than ever because it could be an invaluable tool to help students realistically assess and plan their future. The PSP is approximately 10-15 pages and contains the following sections: Environmental Scan (as it relates to them and their career for the next 5-10 years) Core Values and Personal Mission/Vision Statements; Personal SWOT Analysis; Analysis of their Stakeholders; Statement of their Competitive Advantage; and finally five-seven 5-7 Goals using the SMART System (specific, measureable; attainable; realistic; timed-based).

At the beginning of each semester, the Professor tells the strategy students: “A fundamental question of strategy for the Christian believer is: *How can I honor God in the strategy process?* In this class, we will address personal and organizational goals and ethics. That is, the strong foundation of effective managerial decision making. Therefore, an important theme for this course is, “be strong and courageous.” Drawing from Deuteronomy 31, the Professor tells the story of the Israelites taking the land God has promised them. In the process, they must face some very serious enemies and rely on God throughout the process. The repeated theme of Deuteronomy is to, “be strong and courageous.” Moses tells the people. Moses tells Joshua. God tells Joshua. Joshua tells the people. Everyone tells everyone to be strong and courageous because God goes with them and will not leave them. Students are encouraged reflect on those words as they make their plans for the future. All strategy students are facing graduation and an intense workplace. The Christian student has the additional purpose of pleasing God in life and relying on God’s wisdom and strength. So, students are required to consider what it will mean for them to “be strong and courageous” and to incorporate those ideas into their Personal Strategic Plan.

#### Lectures with Real Time Events

While lectures are a tried and true method of transmitting information, they have limitations, especially in this era of increasingly short student’s attention spans. Millennials who have grown up in an electronic world thrive on multi-tasking and multiple sensory experiences. Millennials are smart but impatient; they are used to short-term gratification; they are masters of multi-tasking. They seem to enjoy and thrive on collaboration. In some cases, what is considered

cheating by traditional professors is seen as team-work to many of our current students. We as professors feel pressure to shorten lectures and deal with a new reality. Undoubtedly, Millennials don't read as much as previous generations did, at least in the traditional media. They prefer video, audio, and interactive media.

One approach we have taken is to integrate meaningful real time websites such as CNBC.com; appropriate YouTube videos (once the laughing stock of professors—we are no longer laughing). In addition, there is a growing set of video resources that are current, inexpensive, and well-researched, such as videos from CNBC, the History Channel, PBS. Fortunately, there is also a growing library of Christian-based videos. As a side-note, we believe that the CBFA needs to encourage and work with Christian film producers to add to our stock of resources via DVD's, YouTube or other visual media devices. Students not only appreciate but tend to learn from this form of communication. That having been said, we notice if we just show videos a majority of students will just watch and not take notes. One effective remedy is writing viewing guides that students must hand in at the end of the class period. While professors can abuse videos in lieu of lecture time, in the 2009 survey when asked whether videos were used the proper amount; 8% said too little; 86% said about right and only 2% said far too much.

## Mega-Issues

While we are awash in information and data, one could arguably say that many of this generation are among the most uninformed in the last 50 years. It gives us no pleasure in saying this, but each passing year the level of knowledge about basic politics, economics, and global issues is waning. While students spend vast amount of time surfing the Internet,(and now in the last two to three years participating in social media), sadly many of them are not well informed even in their own major discipline. (However, we are finding that adult students 25+ in our classes are generally a bit more engaged). But the typical 20-22 year old does not have a sophisticated understanding of the world around them. While we might be able to dismiss this as college students just being college students, we think it is more serious than that and employers have the right to expect business college graduates to function at a much higher level. As indicated earlier, one technique we have used is to integrate *Fortune* magazine as an important part of the course. Approximately every two weeks we assign from five-eight articles. Students come to class and take a quiz before we discuss articles for that week. Not surprising, most students react very positive to the *Fortune* experience and this is encouraging. Students, in many cases, tell us it is one of the first times they have ever kept up with what is currently going on and they actually enjoyed it.

Of particular interest to Christian Business Professors is the substantial library of practical and easy to read articles that Michael Zigarelli has assembled at Christianity 9 to 5 (<http://www.christianity9to5.org/articlesCSU.htm>). Other resources such as Regent University's Global Business Review (<http://www.regent.edu/acad/global/publications/rgbr/>) and the CBFA's own *JBIB* & *CBAR* are rich sources of application material that can be used effectively in a strategy course.

But as important as the *Fortune* readings are, occasionally supplemented by other current journals, it is still our experience that students may lack a more fundamental understanding of major issues that impact the world of business. Because of this, one of us approximately five years ago developed an approach called Mega-Issues. This was not an easy decision to start taking class time to discuss these issues, because it essentially met abandoning the traditional

case study approach used by many, if not most, professors of strategy. But the results and feedback have been very heartening. Students in teams of three-four have to choose from a list of high impact issues and put together an in-depth professionally produced Power Point presentation; present the issue; lead a discussion; and write 10 original quiz questions that are administered immediately after the presentation. The issues are far ranging and tied to ongoing major issues but also “hot” issues. They range from the Budget Deficit to Social Security Reform; to Alternative Energy; Globalization; the growing Power of Asia and so forth. Appendix 1 provides a sampling of some of the issues we have explored over the last few years. We challenge the students to see these issues from a Christian perspective as well as the traditional functional integrative approach advocated by the discipline of strategy.

While we have not yet tested this, our contention is that our business students coming out of the capstone strategy class are better informed than any other students graduating from our universities on current economic, business, and even political issues.

A survey was conducted among two sections of strategy in late 2009. When asked whether they thought the Mega Issue was a good use of time 65% said a good use of time; 31% and excellent use of time and only 4% indicted it was a poor use of time.

### Community Leadership Forum Series

While it is not unique to use guest speakers in classes and forums, one of the distinctive approaches we use is to combine these lectures, speeches and interactions with direct contact and interaction with business community members and our students. Even though the Midwest University, is not a large university (about 3000 undergraduate and 2000 graduate students) and our community is only about 105,000, there is a very close working relationship between our business, nonprofit and professional community. Because of the ongoing efforts at strategic partnerships we have a very positive and strong reputation. Dr. D's contract is for  $\frac{3}{4}$  teaching and  $\frac{1}{4}$  Director of the University's Leadership Center which concentrates on both in-reach and outreach. Due to these strong partnerships when we host events, we invite several business people to come and join the students. We often provide a free lunch (through the use of foundation funds) and deliberately intersperse our students among the business people.

It works the other way as well. We have had major events sponsored by the state, a regional Chamber of Commerce, and our local newspaper where they have opened up the seminars to our students. While the speaker's information is important, of equal importance is the networking and camaraderie that develops between students and the business people. Students get an opportunity to converse with business professionals about real issues in real time.

Recently we were able to share a speaker brought to town by the local CBMC group for their annual prayer breakfast. David Rae, the former Chairman of Apple Computer of Canada and now currently associated with Crown Ministries, gave a compelling testimony and was able to share thoughts on Steve Jobs who had just recently passed away.

### Original Case Analysis

As mentioned earlier, case studies have been a staple of teaching strategy for many years. The Harvard case method is perhaps the mostly widely emulated approach. A few years ago it was difficult to even buy a strategy textbook without  $\frac{1}{3}$  to  $\frac{1}{2}$  or more of the pages devoted to cases. While we certainly are not critical of the case approach, and much can be learned from

both current and classical cases, it has been the experience of Professor D that having students select a company of their own choosing and then writing an original case analysis is not only much more satisfying, more demanding, but also builds stronger analytical and writing skills. It also allows students, in many instances, to select a company or industry that they are targeting for career opportunities. One of the key concepts that is taught early in the semester is the standard six-part decision making model that is in widespread use today. The required case write up is formatted based on this model. The major sections of the paper are summarized in Figure 3. The project is worth 25% of the course grade. Students are required to submit three versions of the case: one electronic; one normal copy for professor markup; and one professionally bound to be used for their portfolio (see Figure 1 below).

This particular approach that requires an original case analysis has dramatic impact on reducing the theory-application gap for students. They are forced to research in journals they might not otherwise be aware of; they must do real time current research and not only propose solutions, but also “sell” and defend them in the most important section - the justification and implementation portion of the paper.

Dr K has also used this method in teaching the class. Students do the original research on a contemporary, publicly traded company. They present their findings and are subjected to a “defense” type question-and-answer session with the Dean of the school asking tough questions.

The feedback as evident in the 2009 surveys is positive. (see Figures 2 and 3 below). This is not an easy project, but some students have told us they have actually gotten job offers based on this particular project. It demonstrates to a potential employer, not only the ability to read, but to think, write, and sell solutions.

**insert Figure 1 here**

**insert Figure 2 here**

**insert Figure 3 here**

#### Personal Strategic Plan –PSP

As mentioned earlier, the PSP generally from 10-15 pages in length and contains the following sections: Environmental Scan (as it relates to the student and their career for the next 5-10 years) Core Values and Personal Mission/Vision Statement ; Personal SWOT Analysis; Analysis of their Stakeholders; Statement of their Personal Competitive Advantage; Five-Seven Goals using the SMART System (specific, measureable; attainable; realistic; timed-based). Rather than analyzing yet another company, the PSP drives home the basic tenets of strategy by allowing the student to go through the planning process on something they are particularly interested in- themselves. It also helps them to integrate course concepts into a comprehensive whole. Results from the 2009 survey are encouraging in supporting the efficacy of the project (see Figures 4 and 5 below).

**insert Figure 4 here**

**insert Figure 5 here**

Additional research on the PSP was conducted in late spring of 2011. Professor K asked her students for some written comments (see Figure 6 below). Professor D did an online survey about three weeks after the end of the semester. For Dr. D's survey almost 50% of the students responded, which given the fact that many of these student had already graduated, is a substantial rate of return

Figure 6 is a sample of written comments from students about the project from both Professor K's class and Professor D's survey. Again while students found the project to be challenging most of them feel it was of great benefit to them.

In the online survey, when students were asked to rate whether the project was worthwhile on a 1-5 scale, 9% said of moderate worth; 70% very worthwhile and 22%extremely worthwhile. When asked if they have or would use this in job interview situations 67% said they either were absolutely or very likely to use the PSP. When asked to rate which parts of the plan were the most valuable on a 1-5 scale (1 = no value and 5 = very valuable) surprising virtually all the components were highly rated, but the number 1 item was assessing their competitive advantage. The rankings based on the ratings are presented below:

1.	Competitive advantage mean	4.83
2.	Core values/mission	4.70
3.	Personal strategies	4.39
4.	Life lessons	4.09
5.	Personal stakeholder analysis	3.91
6.	Environmental scanning	3.61

Of all the techniques we have reviewed we believe, based on our experience and our preliminary research, that the PSP experience is the most unique approach that is worthy of adoption by other universities.

**insert Figure 6 here**

Reading these plans is both an affirming and humbling experience. Students very openly share their faith through their mission and vision statements. Their maturity, focus, and dedication to the Christian faith is reassuring to us as professors. For many of our students this exercise helps them to more fully realize where they came from, the work of God in their lives, and to clearly focus on how God can use them in the future. We don't say this in a cavalier way-- but even if the students did not benefit from this experience (which all the research shows that they do), we believe that the encouragement it gives to us as professors makes the experience well worthwhile. A couple of years ago we shared several of the best plans with both our Vice

President for Academic Affairs and our University President. They were so impressed that they in turn shared them with the University's Board of Trustees.

## CONCLUSION

There will always be and always should be an ongoing debate in the Academy about theory and application. In our Christian institutions, we will continue the discussion of how to best integrate faith and learning. In our teaching, we must be true to tested theories and yet be willing to learn and experiment. With this paper, we have suggested some ways that build upon time-tested teaching techniques but add innovation and experimentation. We would encourage our colleagues to continue with us in this ongoing journey to remain rigorous and yet relevant to those we serve especially at the undergraduate level.

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## Figures and Tables

**Figure 1: Case Model and Specifications**

Component	Points	Description
Case Overview and Summary 3-5 pages	20	Summarize the company's situation. Provide background on founding, how the company has developed over time its current status.
Statement of Key issues and problems 2-3 pages	15	There should be 4-5 key issues, problems, challenges. Pick the most significant one and in 2-3 paragraphs elaborate on why this is the most important issues
Tools of analysis 5-6 pages	50	Choose 3 of the following SWOT; Five forces; Environmental scanning; Industry/life cycle analysis; Distinctive competencies; Strategic group; analysis + everyone must do a financial analysis.
Alternative Generations 2-3 pages	15	Generation of at least 3 potential ways to address the key issue you have chosen. Develop each one and then based on criteria you have set forth chose which one you recommend and why.
Alternative Strategy justification and implementation 7-11 pages	70	In depth justification of your chosen alternative and its implementation. Students are encouraged in this section to think through the implications from a Christian worldview.
Grammar and writing	40	Professionalism in writing, professionally bound and general appearance.
Research and use of appropriate sources	40	Quality and range of sources- used to provide evidence for your conclusions.

**Figure 2: Semantic differentials on Original Case Write Up**

End point -	End point +	Mean	Std. Deviation
<b>1 No use</b>	<b>10 Highly useful</b>	<b>7.38</b>	<b>1.42</b>
<b>1 Learned nothing</b>	<b>10 Learned a great deal</b>	<b>7.71</b>	<b>1.47</b>
<b>1 Too Easy</b>	<b>10 Very difficult</b>	<b>7.20</b>	<b>1.31</b>
<b>1 Did not use knowledge from other courses</b>	<b>10 Did use knowledge from other courses</b>	<b>7.76</b>	<b>1.44</b>
<b>1 No brainer</b>	<b>10 Made me think hard</b>	<b>7.96</b>	<b>1.29</b>
<b>1 Did not improve</b>	<b>10 Improved my</b>	<b>6.61</b>	<b>2.23</b>

my writing skills	writing skills		
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Average time spent 16.67 Hours Std. Deviation 8.29

Figure 3: Semantic differentials on Original Case Write Up – Graphics results

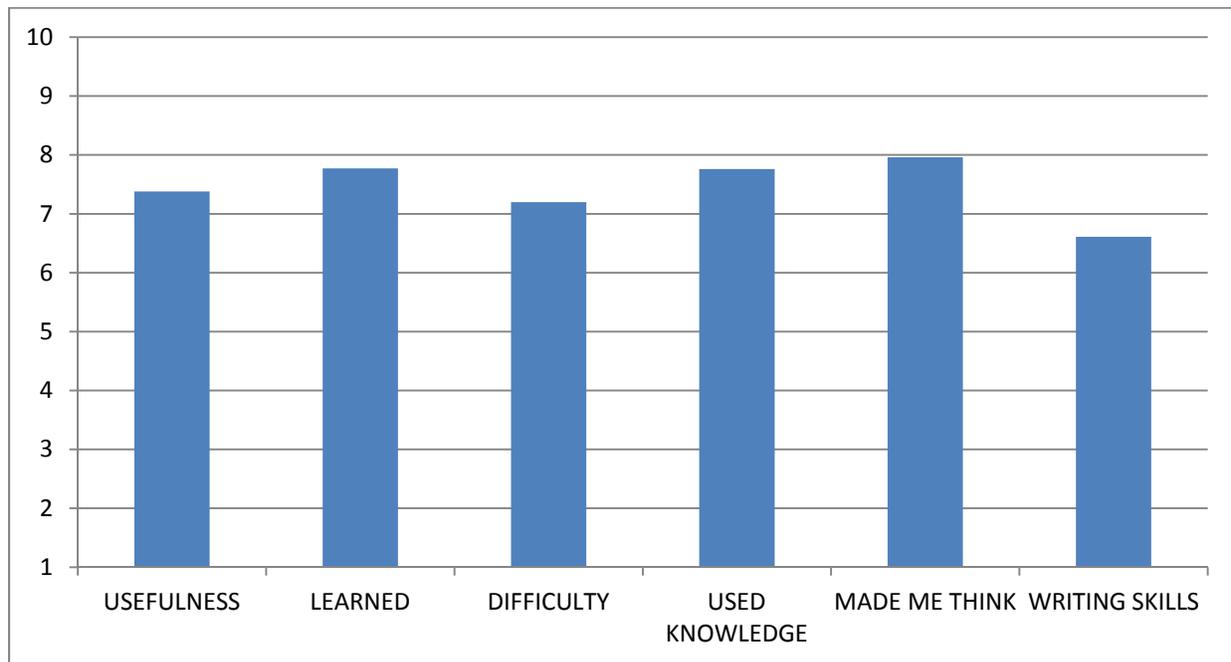
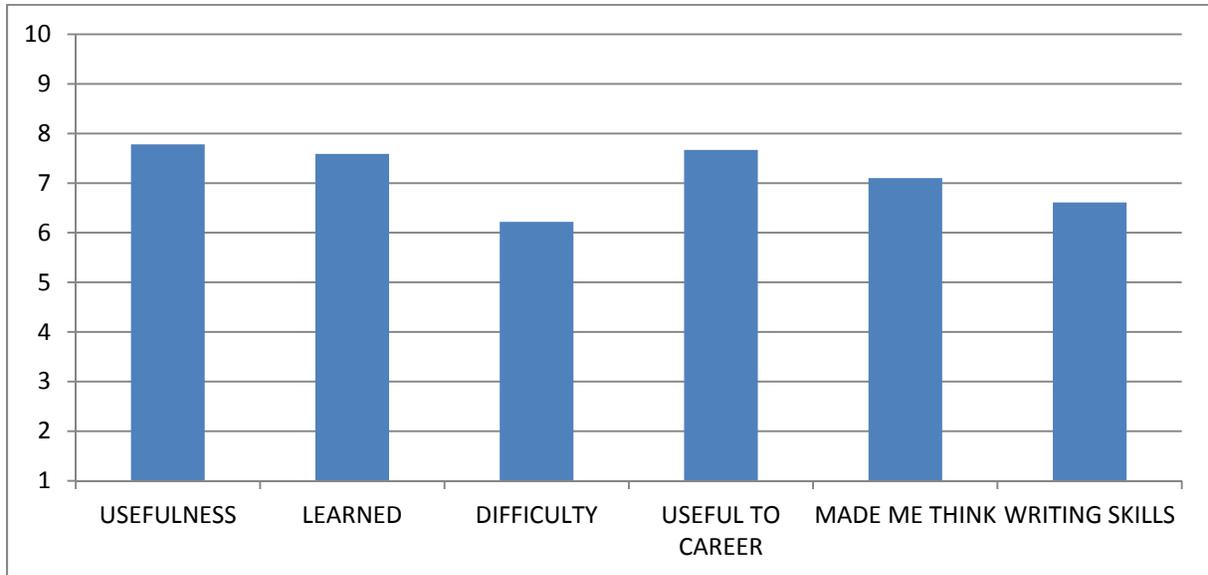


Figure 4: Semantic differentials on Personal Strategic Plan – 2009 Data

End point -	End point +	Mean	Std. Deviation
1 No use	10 Highly useful	7.78	1.64
1 Learned nothing	10 Learned a great deal	7.59	1.70
1 Too Easy	10 Very difficult	6.22	1.14
1 Not useful too career	10 Useful to career	7.67	1.82
1 No brainer	10 Made me think hard	7.10	1.65
1 Did not improve my writing skills	10 Improved my writing skills	6.61	2.23

Average time spent 9.54 Hours Std. Deviation 4.39

**Figure 5: Semantic differentials on Personal Strategic Plan – 2009 Data- Graphic results**



**Figure 6 : Typical Comments from Students on the PSP Project**

I thought it was a really good assignment because it made me stop and think about what plans, goals, etc. that I wanted in life. Many times we all get caught up in everyday life that we don't stop to think about plans for the future.
I think that assignment was great. The interview portion really prepared me for interviews and the SWOT and external analysis gave me great thoughts to share with my interviewers. It made me really think on it and grasp exactly what was the stakes in my life. I give it 4 thumbs up ;)
I really did get a lot out of the PSP, the SWOT and interview part especially. Breaking down my SWOT analysis really helped me understand what I needed to improve on before entering into the business world, plus we use SWOT charts here at the District
I'm graduating Saturday and will be unemployed most likely. Anyways, that assignment has definitely been beneficial to me. Analyzing myself throughout that project helped me think of many pros and cons I could use throughout interviews.
The PSP was a great tool to examine my strengths and weaknesses. I can work on improving my weaknesses, and my strengths are fresh in my mind to play those up during an interview.
The PSP was very good because I feel like it will really help me in the interview process because I am inexperienced in that area.
It was a very eye opening assignment, you really don't realize the extent of your skills and abilities until you take time to evaluate and write them down. I believe this is a very valuable tool of self-analysis.
From walking into an Advertising Agency with the PSP in hand with no reservation for an

interview the owner talked to me right away. They were even offering to have me work for them for an internship, which was really cool to see.

I believe the PSP helped me in a way I have never done, sit down and think about not only my future but also my past and present. By looking at the people and experiences that have affected me throughout my life, I can better understand my strengths and core beliefs going forward into my own occupational life.

The PSP required me to evaluate myself in a way that I had not done before. It also helped me to catch up on current events that will affect my life which was both interesting and useful.

The Personal Strategic Plan was by far one of the best and most influential projects I have done in my college career. It has helped me strengthen academically, professionally, and has shaped my own views and belief of my true potential.

The PSP helped give me a better insight on my own desires in life by giving me the tools I needed to analyze different areas of where I am headed, where I have been and also how I have been influenced by my own personal experiences. I really enjoyed taking time to truly think through my life and how I can better live out my own mission statement and core values.

The PSP gave me great insight to what my core competencies are. While in the job search, I mentally and physically referenced the PSP quite often, linking relevant jobs to my SMART goals that coincide with core competency.

## Appendix 1: MEGA ISSUES - A Sample of Recent Issues

ISSUE	Comments
Aging U.S. Population	The United States is graying-what the impacts for business- how can companies take advantage of these?
America's technological leadership	Will we continue to lead the world in technology creation- why or why not?
Current financial crisis in housing and related credit crunch	Real or imagined threat- what is US government doing about it. ?
Bio and Genetic Engineering	What implications do this hold for our future? What are pros and cons?
Energy –oil & natural gas	Short and long forecasts- are we running out of energy
Energy-alternative forms	What is the future-are they really the saving factor or just a pipe dream?
Global warming-is it real and can we do anything about it if it is?	What implications does it have for your life in the next 10-40 years- what opportunities does it present?
Globalization and its impact on America	What are positive and negative implications as it impacts your careers, companies and lifestyle over the next 10-20 years?,
Growing power and influence of the Hispanic Population	Implications for business, marketing, taxation, border defenses.
Growing Power of Computer Technologies	Impacts they have in job loss/creation/redesign.
Inflation	Recent history, forecasts, implications.
Pension issues and the shift from defined benefit plans to 401(k) approach	Why are businesses doing this- is it a good or bad thing from your perspective?
Population redistribution to the South & Southwest	Will this trend continue and what are the implications for the country?
Rising power of Asia	Including China, India, Korea and other Tiger Economies.
Social Security System	Will it survive- what implications does the future of SS have for your parents and for YOU?
Tax overhaul – most popular proposals	For years there have been plans to overhaul or radically alter the present tax system to make it fairer and more incentive based.
Tort reform	Is there a lawsuit crisis in America? What should be done? Can it be done?

US Budget Deficit and National Debt	Distinguish between the two and explain possible implications.
US Trade deficit	What does this mean for the US economy and citizens?
World Population Growth	Will we peak and actually decline or was Malthusian economics right after-all?